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## **The United States assists banana producers' associations to inaugurate cableway extensions**

On August 29, Vice Minister of Coca and Integrated Development, Gerónimo Meneses, Vice Minister of Social Defense, Felipe Cáceres, Deputy Director of the U.S. Agency for International Development in Bolivia, Peter Natiello, and two banana producers' associations of Chapare inaugurated improvement projects at banana packing facilities. The improvements include a significant extension of banana transport cableways, which improve the handling of the producers' products.

The Association of Banana Producers (ASPROBA) of Doce Estrellas, near Ivirgarzama, inaugurated 3.5 kilometers of cableways, while the Association of Farm Producers Cornelio Saavedra (APACSA), also near Ivirgarzama, inaugurated another 5.5 kilometers of cableways. The cableway system is a modern means of transporting bananas from their point of harvest to the packing center while protecting their quality in transit.

The banana packing facilities provide employment to more than 70 workers, through ASPROBA and APACSA. The associations contributed 50% of the infrastructure improvement costs, which totaled approximately \$68,000. The updated infrastructure will allow the associations and their members to improve the quality of their products, expand their production, and increase their current exports, thus generating additional sales by up to \$600,000 by the end of 2009.

The production of bananas has generated approximately 13,000 full-time jobs in the Chapare region. Approximately 3,500 farms are currently exporting bananas and pineapples to foreign markets.

Annual banana exports have increased by more than 1,000%, from over 289,000 boxes in 2000 to more than 3.3 million boxes in 2006, with an increase in market value from \$2.5 million to almost \$25 million.

The United States Government has cooperated for 15 years with Chapare farmers, who previously sold their products only in domestic markets. As a result of this cooperation the farmers have improved the quality of their products, received better prices in regional markets, and accessed new markets in Europe. This support includes improvement or construction of packing facilities, installation of cableways, and technical assistance to better organize production phases, while at the same time implementing quality control systems.

In their visit to the Chapare region, the Bolivian and American authorities also inaugurated a bridge in Senda C, which was built by the Road Maintenance Association (AMVI-II) with

resources provided by the U.S. cooperation. The delegation also delivered organic fertilizers to banana producers whose farms had been seriously damaged by the floods earlier this year. As part of the Integrated Alternative Development Program carried out by the governments of Bolivia and the United States, these investments seek to promote the expansion of opportunities and the diversification of economic development.